

COMPLAINTS  
CONCERNING  
CORRUPTIONS AND  
GRIEVANCES IN CHURCH-  
GOVERNMENT.

DEDICATED AND DI-  
RECTED to the KINGS most Ex-  
cellent Majestie, the right Honourable  
LORDS, and the Honourable House  
of COMMONS now assembled in  
PARLIAMENT.

By certaine peaceably affected Presbyters of  
the Church of England, in the name of  
all the rest of their BRETHREN.

Vndertaking to maintaine the truth of their  
Assertions, against whatsoever Contradictours, if  
by publique Edict of supreme authority they  
be called forth, granting them as safe  
and free audience as their Adversaries  
and Iudge s not preingaged, or pre-  
resolved for either side.

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Printed in the yeare. 1641.

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# COMPLAINTS CONCERNING CORRVPTIONS AND GRIEVANCES IN CHURCH-GOVERNMENT.

**I**T is the misery of pious undertakings, especially in matters of weight, that by reason of humane frailtie, they cannot be perfected at once, but by degrees, and after much time: whence it cometh to passe, that they are often given over, or by intervening opposition forced to abortion, and imperfect issue. Such was the case of that great reformation begun with us, as in the daies of those renowned Princes, King Edward, and Queene Elizabeth, and till this day, remaining unaccomplished.

Those now blessed Martyrs and holy Confessours, who were under those pious Princes, the first Reformers of our Church found things by that Papall Apostacy so much corrupted and disjointed, that being unable at once to cope with all the diseases of the Church, they did as wise Physicians, set themselves first against the

most deadly, deferring the rest till afterwards.

Hence by suffering and preaching, they mightily pulled downe the Babylon of Popish doctrine, and something too they did in matter of Government and Discipline. But because the vitalls of the Church consist in doctrinall verities, therefore their chiefe bent of endeavour was for a reformation in them, which in their time with great successe they effected: leaving the reducing of Government and Discipline to it's Primitive integritie, as a worke to bee done by posteritie.

But, alas, as usually it falls out, the bellows of persecution ceasing, the fire of zeale soone beganne to abate: so that after that first heate and *impetus* of reformation, (as if they which had but begun, had at one essay done more then enough) the businesse went on no further even till this day, Nay, (as some edifice given over before it bee covered) it hath since rather decayed and fallen backe againe. Such power hath pompe and ease to blunt the edge of sacred inventions, and quench the spirit of reformation.

As maladies not perfectly cured, returne, or turn to some other diseases, so was it with this imperfect reformation; doctrinall points being reduced, but matter of discipline left in it's former state, almost untouched: hence arose amongst us, even from the cradle of our reformed Church, three severall opinions, which have



have continued even till this time: whose discord nourished by opposition of hot spirits, hath encreased till now they are come to that extremitie; that the life and being of this sacred Bodie, is even endangered thereby.

One side cries downe Episcopacie for Antichristian; and all the dependent Government, Canons, Ceremonies, and Liturgie for remainders of Poperie, abominable, and to bee departed from. The other extreme, cries it up for sacred, of Divine, Apostolicke institution; and it's dependent Politie for the most absolute, to which all ought to be brought, as to a Rule of Perfection: censuring other Churches which have it not, either as none, or els imperfect, wanting a maine part of their *benefit*.

In the midst of these two, are a Remnant of sad lookers on, which have mourned in secret, suffered with patience, prayed for peace, and preached it, and sanctification to the people; while those other two, one by separating, the other by persecuting, and both by froward disposing, have served up their differences to an intollerable, irreconcilable height. Both these sacrificing to their own conceits, account all which are not with them, to be against them. But especially, that Episcopal faction (for distinctions sake give us leave so to call it:) which by the indulgence of gracious Princes growing powerfull, have laboured an extirpation of all which will not thinke, say, and

swear to their opinions. Hence of late have all beene involved, as of the opposite faction, which are not of theirs; and no place left for a moderate neutrality. New Ceremonies, Tasks, Canons, Oathes have beene invented, as nets and fives to try out all, as bad fish, or chaffe, which have but disliked the remaining corruptions and defects, which the first plunge of Reformation did not redresse. No tolerating now of any thing as a burthen; much lesse silent disliking of what wee could in secret grieve for, but not amend: but approve all, weare to all we must, or else be thrust out, as schismaticke Puritans, and excommunicacions burthens of the Church.

On this enforcement, We (a part of a Multitude of laborious *Presbyters* of the Church in the name of all the rest) doe now Complain: because in this height of alldevouring Faction, our patient silence will no longer privileged us from extirpation.

And such into our hands; God hath put so blessed an opportunity, as to speak to the whole Kingdome, Head and Members at once, in one Body, conjoynd and intent, about a work of Reformation. We be humbly bold and plaine to lay open our Grievances, hoping that the set time is come for the quenching of these coales of dissension, which have not only lived, but increased for so many years in the Church; by completing of that Reformation; which in

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the maine vitall points was long since effected: and in the rest (wee hope, and pray) after more then an age of interruption, is reserved as your Crowne and Glory to be perfected.

Experience hath e're this taught as the woefull effects of an halfe done worke: the upshot of our jarres now declares that scrupulous urging of Ritualls, cannot stand with the welfare of a Church. Those Convulsions, and renteing Paines the body now feels, shew us that the humours were not at first fully purged: God will have a through worke done. If instead of redressing that which remaines, you thinke to transact all these differences by removing of Persons, and not Things; well you may hush our Troubles for a season, but they will returne againe with a greater violence.

Now is that Power actuated, which alone can bring to passe this great worke. And if the Lord take pleasure in this his poore Church, he will give the effect, that it may be performed.

If men would rest in the sole authority of the Scriptures, most controversies both about points of Faith and Formes of Government would finde an easie resolution. And if besides Gods Word, we bring in mens authority we draw out the thred of contention into endless disputes: mens faces differ not more in feature then their mindes doe in opinion: and each will dore on, and propugne his owne conceits: their judgements dissent one from another,

another, and offe from themselves.

Let the divinely inspired writings then bee our guide in this point of Church Government: what is there constituted must bee held inviolable: what is a deviation from that, must bee accounted Apostacy and Corruption, as well in Discipline as in Doctrine: no plea of antiquity or universality, can privilege it from that imputation, what is not therein appointed, must at most bee held but as conducent not necessary. No, though it be proved to be received into the Churches, in the age immediately succeeding the Apostles: all after them were but of a private spirit. And it is apparent that Ambition and Corruptions grew up as soone in the Government of the Church, as Errors in the Doctrine thereof.

Suffer us therefore, with your wonted patience and lenity, which are men preingaged to no side or faction, but the free humble and meek servants of Truth, to declare our minds concerning the first and purest form of the Church's government; and then (as *Veritas est mensura sui et obliqui*) from that light to discover the heave grievances which at this day remaine unremoved in our Nationall Church.

1. It is a perpetuall Ordinance of Christ, that there should be *Pastors* and *Teachers* in the Church for the administration of the Word, Sacraments, and spirituall Discipline.

2. That there should be a Societie of these  
*Pastors*

*Pastors* or *Presbyters* in every particular Church, is an Apostolicke appointment; who have also exactly prescribed what manner of men they ought to be.

3. That this company of Elders should have the charge of the Church, in which they are constituted: and the power of Feeding, Censuring and Ordering the Flocke committed to them: as also of ordering Elders and Officers in the Church: The worke of Preaching and sacramentall administration to be done by any one of them: But that of Jurisdiction and Ordination by the society, as a common Act, not competible to any one in particular.

4. Among these, and in all their Acts, there ought to be Decencie, Order, the Bond of Peace, Humility, Meeknesse, and an ayme, that the spirit of the most scandalous Offender, or stubbornest opposer may be brought to Repentance, and saved in the Day of the *Lord Jesus*.

5. That the Bounds and extent of every particular Church ought to be a Towne, and so much of the adjacent Territory and Villages as such a Presbytery can well by themselves watch over, and take a spirituall care of.

6. That this society, especially those of them which labour in the word and Doctrine, may challenge from the People, whom they take spirituall care of, *double honour*, and liberal suitable Maintenance, to the Calling they execute.

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7. That every one who is consecrate to this Presbyterie or Office must *wait on it* : be *instant* in it, and therefore reside within the confines of that Church, where he hath such charge, or there where he may by himselfe on all occasions attend on it.

8. That in cases of strife and difficulty in any Church, recourse must be had to the Meeting of the most able Presbyters of the Churches for their determinations : and every one ought to subject his Spirit to the Spirits of such Prophets, yielding to the Customes of the Churches of *God* : provided they crosse not the All-commanding evidence of *Gods* immutable Word, either directly, or by due consequence.

These are Rules in the Gospell, either directly constituted, or evidently deduced out of expresse Constitution; or practise so solemn and Universall, that it hath in it the reason and vertue of a Constitution: so that every addition which thwarteth or hindereth the due execution of these, must needs be accounted a Degeneration from originall purity of Government; and a corruption in sacred Politie, have it never so much Antiquity, or weight of humane Authority to plead for it, and give countenance to it.

One thing more there is which on probable ground, seemeth to be taken up by the practise of some Churches in the latter end of the Apostolike age, some of them yet living, and that is the



the prostatic or presidency of one of these *pastors, Bishops* or *Presbyters* above the rest. But it cannot possibly with any colour of consequence be proved to be *Authoritative*: being only for Order and Unitie, that all their common Acts should have a beginning from One: as if many Deacons should appoint an Arch-Deacon; or many Bishops an Arch-Bishop, in common acts to be the Mouth and Hand of the society.

And this preeminence of One (if the utmost of darke probability be granted) appeareth to be but the meere practise of some particular Churches; so that it cannot have the universall binding force of a Law from that ground; much lesse of an Apostolike Constitution, or Divine Right.

Now are we descended from the first Age; and so what ever follows can be but of humane and alterable Constitution. Very soon these presidents of the *Presbyteries*, either assumed, or by their Compresbyters had conferred on them Authority and Jurisdiction; and by way of propriety the name of *Bishop*: so that where before it was the Presbytery, now it was the *Bishop* and his *Presbyters*.

But observe: 1. That his Dioces, Parish, or Church was no larger then He and his *Presbyters* could well Oversee and Govern. 2. That this *Bishop* had the Burthen, as well as the Dignitie and Chieftie passed over to him, for He was the ordinary Preacher of that Church: the

*Presbyters* for the most part assisting in matter of Discipline and sacramentall Administration. 3. That he did nothing of weight by himselfe, but with the concurring Authority and consent of his *Presbyterie*.

Beyond this, we will not proceed: for these *Bishops* now gotten above their Brethren, and making up the maine body of the Councils, in which all Decrees were enacted, knew how to make the distance 'twixt themselves and their once Compresbyters greater and greater, by lifting up themselves, and depressing those, who now of Associates were become Servants and Vassals to Episcopall principalitie.

But what-ever came to passe in after Ages, it was but by the hand of Man established, and the like hand may abolish it: reduced all must be to the former Scripture and Apostolik rules. If accessories deviat from them, they are Apostacies, which must be reduced, if there bea through Reformation. How can their maintenance be justified in a Church which hath professed to make the Scriptures her Rule, and to reject all which is exalted against its Divine and absolute Sovereignty.

Prooves we have not annexed to the former asserted Truths, to avoyd over-bold prelixitie in a supplication of this nature: as also because the most of them are obvious to every Mans collection which is exercised in *Gods* Booke. But if any of them shall be opposed, being called to it by Authority, and having the freedom

dome of indifferent, not preingaged Judges we will by Gods grace with all meeknesse make good what is heere asserted against all contradiction of gain-layers.

Now will we proceed to an enumeration of those obliquities and corruptions in our *Church Government*, which call to your *supream Power* to be rectified. And wee protest before the All-knowing *God*, that Wee doe it not our ofenvie of any mans Greatnesse, or ambitious Affectation to bee meddling in State affaires, things too high for us: but from the powerfull command of Conscience; from unfaigned love to the Gospell of *Christ*, whose Efficacie is much impeached by the following Corruptions; and and from filiall Commiseration of our wounded and torne Mother: Whose breaches wee verily apprehend cannot be made up, but by reducing of her Discipline to a pure Concordance with those originall Divine Prescriptions. We complain then,

1. That the Power of Jurisdiction and Ordination is claimed and exercised by *Bishops*, as their sole Right, in a distinction from *Presbyters*. This we affirme to be an Exorbitance from the second of those right; originall and Apostolike Ordinances for Church Government. And as it is a departure from the Rule; so it is a maine corruption of evill consequence in the Church: for it is, First, an Usurpation and undue appropriation of a Legacie which *Christ* bestowed in Common, to reside in the

*Confessum*, or whole *Presbyterie*, and to bee exercised by their common suffrage. It not being in the *Presbyters* power to strip themselves, and cast on one man that which was bestowed, and by the Donor intended to the whole Community of their Societie. Secondly, a severing of the Word and the Keyes, which cannot without detriment to either bee sundred. To Feed and Rule are the two parts of *Pastor-ship*: where both are, there is a *Pastor*: so that, with us, while it is Ones worke to governe which seldom Feedeth: and the worke of the rest to Feed, which must not meddle with Government, there is no full *Pastor*: But the Office is destroyed by being divided; and the Word in the mouthes of a disarmed *Presbyterie* is weake, edgelesse and contemptible. Thirdly, the ordaining of a Number of *Presbyters* at large: whereby the *Church* is filled with needy Ministers, loose from any settled employment, sit at low rates to bee hired by fat Pluralists, Non-Residents, and Lazie Voluptuaries; which else would bee to seeke of Mercenarie supplies, or bee driven in a penurie to give higher wages. But hereby the Sacred Office is exposed to Contempt; and the Ordination to the Office and Institution into a Charge, are made severall Acts; a divorce unheard of in that Primitive Politie: Which grosse abuse could not bee, if Ordination were the common Act of the whole *Presbyterie* of a *Church*. Fourthly, intromission

to the Oversight of Congregations of Men Simoniackall, scandalous, and unapt to teach: which can easily steale into Office, by the connivence or corruption of One; but if the Power were in a Multitudo, it could not soone be effected.

2. The excessive Provinciaall extent of Diocesan *Churches*, is an evident departure not onely from the fift of those pure originall Constitutions; but also from the manner of after Ages, till *Bishops* in their Synods provided better for their own Greatnesse, then the *Churches* welfare. Then they degraded the *Chorepiscopi*; and made Orders that *Bishops* should be placed only in the greater and more frequented Cities. This is, as a departure from the first pure manner; so much for the worse; for hence arise these Grievances: Neglect of Reformation, both in disordered Ministers and People: Remotenesse of the *Bishops* seat: Expences of Travailing; Difficultie of proving, and tedious expectation of the issue of Suits, where Crimes must bee tried before Judges, who are meere strangers to the Persons and Causes comming before them, deterre almost all men from so troublesome an undertaking: And thus the *Churches* are pester'd with infamous Offenders; which could not be if the bounds of a *Church* were so appointed, that all its members might be under the eye of the Governours. 2. Deputation of Authoritie and Jurisdiction to others;

a most grosse degeneration from that Primitive Discipline; which never heard of such a thing as the deputing of any part of *Pastorall Office*: which is committed to Men for their Personall abilities; and cannot without abuse be committed to those who are oft Lay men, and neither of *Pastorall* parts or Calling. Hence that numerous frie& subordination of Officers, with the multitude of Fees, which must needs be, where the *Churches* are whole *Countries*; so large, that it is impossible that one *Pastor* should dispatch all by himselfe.

3. The Non-residence of men having *Pastorall Charge* is a grosse violation of the seventh of those Apostolike Constitutions; and is an unexcusable Corruption, unfit to be tolerated in any well governed *Church*.

4. A Plurality of *Pastorall Charges* undertaken by one Man; is also a grosse exorbitancie, brought in with the former, after *Church Government* was at the worst. Two Evils, which are the shame of our *Church*, not fit to bee named in a Reformed *Church*; brought in, and continued meerely to nourish Ambition, Pompe, Voluptuousnes, and Avarice in *Clergie-men*. These two usually goe together, this last necessitating the former; and are seminarie Evils. First, inducing a necessitie of deputing *Pastorall Charge*, which every one before God undertakes to performe in his owne Person. Secondly, *Church Robbery*, by transporting the sacred allow-  
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ance paid and intended for the maintenance of a vigilant painfull *Pastor* over the soules of the People which afford it to another Place and Person; which hath onely the *Title* and *Charge*, but doth not the worke of a *Pastor*. 3. Thirdly, Impietie in placing a Mercenary unable for the *Charge*; or Injustice, if He substitute one able and fully discharging the *Office*, allowing him the least part of that maintenance which was originally intended (and in no other plea can be challenged of the People) for performing the *Office*.

5. Imposing, and rigorous urging on great, undoing, extirpating Penalties, Ceremonies, Taskes, and Oathes, meerely *ad placitum*, and for their owne ends; contrary to the fourth of those prime Scriptre Cannons; wherby Christian libertie in indifferents is much impaired. Many worthy Men of great abilities, paines and successe of Ministry in their *Charges*, but of tender and strict Consciences, have been thrust out; schismes and dissensions in the bowels of the *Church*, for the space now of more then fourescore yeares nourished, to the prejudice of our Ecclesiasticall Peace; which we apprehend can never be fully attained, till liberty of Conscience in indifferencies, and points of small consequence, but great Controversie bee granted. If severitie of Censures, and force could have brought forth Unitie, it had in this time beene effected. This Remedie hath beene long applied

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plied, and yet sad experience now tells us, that the disease hath growne worse and worse.

6. The carriage and constitution of our Convocations or (if they may be so called) our Nationall Synodes is such, that it is impossible to proceed to a reformation in any of these Ecclesiasticall distortions, by that way: what are they, for the maine, but Meetings of the one Party, consisting of Bishops, Deanes, Archdeacons, and other dependers on Episcopacy, and preengaged persons? So that there is a little hope for us of reformation in points of Government, from them, as was for the Protestants side, of a faire decision of their controversies in the Councell of Trent, where parties are Judges, the sentence is passed, before the cause is heard.

We have done. Would to *God* we could make the Churches maladies, and our grievances fewer: So far are we from making them odious, by raising them to a multitude. These six we conceive to be the Capitall and Seminary evils: Others of inferior allay we omit, because they mostly flow from these, and the principall being removed, the Accessories will also fall.

Oh that there were a way to cure Ulcers, and not first to unrip them, and lay them open? We protest before the searcher of all hearts! that nothing but our zeale to the Truth, and our Mothers welfare, could have moved us our  
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of a resolution of silence, and brought us to stand up thus as Plaintiffes.

Far be it from any charitably minded Christian, whose eye shall be cast on these papers, to passe on us any hard Censure of Heresie, Schism, or factious inclination.

We call not all Episcopacie Anti-Christian, nor condemne their superiority, as simply unlawfull, as did that old *Aërius*. Though we must needs say, what every Godly Antiquary cannot but see, that it was a faire occasion for that Mystery of iniquity to worke on; a fitly raised ground on which to build that fabrick of confusion, the Papacy. That man of sinne, soon learned to exalt himselfe above Bishops; from their elevation above their once fellow Presbyters. How justly were they made Vassals to the Pope, who first had made the Presbyters of the Churches theirs?

Neither do we *erigere aliare contra aliare*, dissolve the Churches unity, and leave her Communion for these corruptions. When we call for a Cure, we affirme that there is life, and hope of recovery. It is an argument that our charity remaines; and therefore we cannot be charged as Novations, and Separatists.

A turbulent distemper'd zeale, cannot be imputed to them whose ayme is peace, whose deare esteeme of unity is such, that they could redeeme it with their blood: And who all this time have borne these burthens, now com-

plained of, with a silent patience, and had still continued under an humble submission, and yeelding conformity, if that would have given content, as till these times it had done: But when things grew to that extremity, that we must not onely beare, but allow, and sweare Vassallage, to that which we cannot but call corruptions, and defections, in Government, from Apostolike Puriy: It was high time to complaine, and to cry out, for a remouall of evils, which we must approve, or not Be.

Politically defects and distempers, can have no redresse, but from that power, which is supreme; Vnto that therefore, with all prostrate humility, we present our earnest request, that these evils, being discovered, may be removed.

We are poore Men, of low condition, whose measure is not to rule, but to submit. We prescribe not formes of Government: We disclame not Episcopacie, Government must be, or ruine will be in all Societies. If we must obey, as good a Bishop with a Presbytery, as a Presbytery without a Bishop. Al we sue for is, that *Christ* may rule without impeachment, in his owne House. That those generall forealledged constitutions, which he and his Apostles setled in the Churches of their first gathering, may be observed inviolable.

Humane Ordinances should further, not make voyd, or hinder Divine. Let your Authority reteyne in Government, or establish  
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what it seeth convenient, so it concord with, or at least, doe not enervate those sacred Rules. What ever is against them, or so besides them, that it any whit stands in their way, must be removed, or we shall never see true peace : That peace which kisseth Righteousnesse, which is the firme Band of Spirituall unity.

Restlesse paines, and inordinate Action, must needs be the consequent of Luxations : when the members are out of their due places, some higher set, some lower, then they should be : Innovation it must needs be termed, and defection, be the Authors never so many, Ancient, or holy, where their additionals swerve from, and oppose the use, and intention of Originall Constitutions.

A redressement of this, is the substance of our lowly Petition ; we presume not to define the manner how, but we beseech that it may be, and fully, so that matter be not left for a third Convulsion, and solidly, that Corruptions spring not againe, out of any remayning principles. So shall the Soules of all those who love the *Lord Iesus* in sincerity, and prefer his Truth, beyond selfe-respects, both in present, and future ages renowne your names, as of those who have done worthily : However, we have discharged our Duty ; and let the Lord find meanes, and time, to root out, whatever he hath not planted.

FINIS.